

Elements of a strong, engaging public arts project

The following notes reflect some of my impressions from observing Arts in the Parks projects, summer 2016. These elements usually made for stronger, more interesting, more engaging projects.

Close connection to the particular park site

- The strongest, most engaging Arts in the Parks events I've attended have been **firmly connected to place** – “tailored to the unique assets of the site” – drawing on the natural environment (awareness of types of flora and fauna; landscapes; use of trails; working with naturalists and bringing audiences into nature centers), a park's particular history (how it was established; built structures).
- **When the artist and park staff (interpreter, property manager, etc.) have a good relationship, it shows in the final result.** It's clear when there has been an exchange of ideas; these relationships also illustrate the artist's respect for the park, its calendar, its needs.
- **Anticipate multiple visits to the park** as part of your planning process. Be open to allowing these experiences shape your project.

Communicating with the Audience

- **Assume that attendees may be new to the park** – use simple signage (i.e. small, reusable yard signs) to guide them to your event.
- Signage is also a useful means of **acknowledging the support that makes your project** free to the public.
- On busy days, your signage will help confirm for casual attendees that yes, they are in the right place for your event.
- **When an event requires registration, e-mail communication** with advance information (what to expect, what to bring, rain location/date, etc.) may help ensure attendance on the day, and also create a group feel even before the event is under way.
- **Assume that some, if not many, of your attendees may not know about the IAC.** This is an important opportunity to let the person who says, “Hey, it's great that I don't have to pay for this painting class!” know that the class is made possible by public funding.
- Depending on the nature of the project, **you may benefit from having an assistant** capable of interacting with the audience as you lead the event.
- **Be ready for audiences of all ages and backgrounds** (park staff will know their audience and be able to let you know what to expect). If you are doing a hands-on art program, be prepared to work with children as well as adults.
- In addition to providing information to the park/DNR, use your own existing networks – mailing list, social media (Facebook, Twitter), website/blog – to help **promote the event.**